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Annie Bleton-Ruget and Philippe Poirrier, Eds., *Le temps des sciences humaines. Gaston Roupnel et les années trente*. Paris: Éditions le Manuscrit-Maison des sciences de l'homme de Dijon, 2006. 279 pp. Notes. 21.90 € (pb). ISBN 2-7481-8196-4.

Review by John Strachan, University of Manchester, United Kingdom.

More than a generation ago, Eugen Weber's landmark work, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, chronicled the modernization of rural France and the decline of pre-national forms of culture.[1] On balance, of course, Weber was right. Under the Third Republic, the center had triumphed over the periphery in ways that were both decisive and durable. Over time, Weber's argument would also have the effect of changing the historiographical landscape by making the case for the nation-state as the driving force in modern French history. Recently, historians of provincial France have confirmed this enduring influence, unintentionally, perhaps, by turning their attention to the ways in which the provinces were reinvented within the context of France's newfound nationhood.[2] In the interwar period especially, national identities were increasingly forged on the basis of an archetypal, mythical France that was, above all, rural and agricultural. Just as peasants became Frenchmen before Weber's eyes, Frenchmen were now becoming peasants.

Annie Bleton-Ruget and Philippe Poirrier's volume approaches the work of Gaston Roupnel from the same perspective--the importance of the rural, the agricultural and the peasant within broader, national trends in the culture, academia, and politics of interwar France. *Le temps des sciences humaines. Gaston Roupnel et les années trente* is a collection of papers from the conference of the same name that was held at the Université de Bourgogne in December 2001. In part, the volume is intended as a further exploration of the issues raised by Philip Whalen's intellectual biography of Roupnel and the responses that Whalen's work inspired.[3] Roughly half the chapters focus predominantly on Roupnel himself (Whalen, Vigreux, Demossier, Laferté, Wunenburger and Poirrier). Others explore Roupnel's significance within a diverse intellectual context and explain why his work merits a far wider audience than it has enjoyed to date (Bleton-Ruget, Chambarlhac, Rauwel, Hubscher and Libis).

What emerges most forcefully from the present volume is Roupnel's unexpected centrality to the major cultural and intellectual currents of the interwar period. A celebrated historian and novelist, with significant interests in the Burgundian wine industry, Roupnel's *oeuvre* is difficult to locate by reference to standard academic criteria. Teaching at the University of Dijon, he remained consciously marginal to an academic and publishing community that looked inexorably towards Paris. Roupnel benefited, however, from the extraordinary potency of the national-rural imaginary of interwar France. Bleton-Ruget argues that agricultural affairs and ideological constructions of the peasantry proved increasingly compelling in the high politics of the period (pp. 27-29). In a similar vein, Whalen and Vigreux reflect on how fears of decline and decadence informed much of the agrarianism of the 1930s and the perceived growth of a rural-urban divide (pp. 55-56, 152). For Hubscher, the Union Centrale des Syndicats des Agriculteurs de France, the Parti Agraire et Paysan Français and other such groups constituted a veritable and powerful rural lobby (p. 125). In this fortuitous political context, Whalen continues, Burgundians were quick to exploit their region's inherent cultural capital. Wine, gastronomy and folklore were now appropriated as "*corniches sémiologiques d'un édifice culturel bourguignon*" (p. 58).[4] Demossier's chapter shows how Roupnel's eclectic and avant-gardist novel *Nono*, focusing on the archetypal Burgundian vigneron, became an important part of the regionalist economic revival.[5]

Academic interests reflected the politicization and commercialization of all things rural. Bleton-Ruget's introductory and opening essays discuss the rapidly changing terrain of the human sciences and the search for new epistemological forms (p. 19). A turn toward regional case studies had been advocated by Henri Berr's *Revue de synthèse historique* in 1903 as the best means of grasping the complex social psychology of France's regions. This and other historical approaches soon dovetailed with the work of geographers trained in the regionalist methods of Paul Vidal de la Blache (pp. 32-35). Increasingly, a "science" of rural France was evolving at the crossroads of history and geography, with the newer disciplines of anthropology and ethnography finding their inspiration in, and testing many of their techniques against, the writings of Roupnel and his interlocutors.[6] Throughout *Le temps des sciences humaines*, Roupnel's writings are seen to have cross-fertilized with such diverse and major intellectual contemporaries as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Roger Dion, Albert Demangeon, André Varnagrand, Michel Leiris, Gaston Bachelard and Henri Bergson.

Perhaps the most immediate and relevant comparison to be made is between Roupnel and the historians of the early Annales School. Poirrier makes much of the similarities between Roupnel's and Fernand Braudel's concepts of 'structural history' and 'geo-history' (pp. 246-48). Braudel spoke warmly of Roupnel's methodological essay *Histoire et destin* at his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in December 1950.[7] Febvre's judgement was altogether cooler, though this arguably had more to do with Roupnel's outsider status and his perceived relationship with Vichy than with any real intellectual divergences. Convergences with Bloch, as we shall see, are also perceptible. In sum, the relationship of the early Annales to Roupnel, and to his Burgundian intellectual *milieu*, is an important part of the story. In this respect, *Le temps des sciences humaines* may be regarded as a significant contribution to a recent historiography that has sought to broaden and deepen the origins of French social history.[8]

Bleton-Ruget and Poirrier's volume does not provide any definitive answer to the thorny question of Roupnel's proximity to the wartime regime. The extent of Roupnel's willingness to be appropriated by Vichy's own racialized national-rural imaginary is indeed difficult to determine. Vigreux argues that Vichy's National Revolution provided an unprecedented political opportunity for rural regionalism. In contrast to Bloch's defiant stance, Roupnel supposedly allowed himself to be flattered and honored by a regime that adopted *Histoire de la campagne française* as a work of reference (pp. 161-171). Whalen, however, challenges the idea that Roupnel was a Franco-German collaborationist and a proponent of a racialized theory of the French peasantry. Roupnel's, he argues, was an intelligent and nuanced regionalism in which the role of race was mitigated by a host of geographical and cultural factors, and by the impact of migration (p. 63). In fact, Roupnel's wartime writing shows him to be a patriot, challenging the German occupation by representing it as something that was foreign, transitory and inauthentic (p. 73).

A brief comparison with Bloch may shed more light on the intricacies of Roupnel's ideological positioning. Bleton-Ruget argues that Bloch was opposed to rural histories that relied on mythical, racial or totalizing views of the peasantry. In this respect, he opposed the work of many contemporary French geographers, and was heading for a showdown with German theorists at the Fourteenth International Sociology Conference that was due to take place in Bucharest in August 1939 (pp. 41-53). Roupnel's stance on race as an important, if not determining, factor was more ambiguous. Nevertheless, he seems to have been aware, as a number of contributors to the present volume suggest, that the archetypal image of the Burgundian peasant that he had helped to create was, at root, a mythical one. If Roupnel was less of a mythologist than Roland Barthes, the interwar human sciences benefited nonetheless from the perspective of a man whose vision of rural France combined celebration with pure analysis.[9]

Le temps des sciences humaines. Gaston Roupnel et les années trente is an important, original and timely contribution to the history of the human sciences. Roupnel emerges as a complex, sophisticated, and problematic thinker whose work deserves to be read far more widely than it is. The present volume is a

credit to the editors and contributors and should be read by all those interested in interdisciplinarity, intellectual history, the history of the human sciences, regionalism, peasant studies, and the practice and writing of history.

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NOTES

[1] E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[2] Amongst many others, see J.-F. Chanut, *L'école républicaine et les petites patries* (Paris: Aubier, 1996); S. Peer, *France on Display: Peasants, Provincials, and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World's Fair* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); J. Strachan, "Romance, Religion and the Republic: Bruno's *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants*", *French History* 18 (2004), 96-118; A.-M. Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France. L'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997).

[3] P. Whalen, *Gaston Roupnel: ame paysanne et sciences humaines* (Dijon: Éditions Universitaires Dijon, 2001); <http://www.h-france.net/vol3reviews/poirrier1.html>, accessed June 2007.

[4] See also K. M. Guy, *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

[5] G. Roupnel, *Nono* (Paris: Plon, 1910).

[6] Especially G. Roupnel, *Histoire de la campagne française* (Paris: Grasset, 1932), his major work of the interwar period and still his best known.

[7] G. Roupnel, *Histoire et destin* (Paris: Grasset, 1943); F. Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 7.

[8] J. Dewald, *Lost Worlds: The Emergence of French Social History, 1815-1870* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2006).

[9] R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957).

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